

House Church as a Faucet

by Maurice Smith

As I was preparing to write this, I re-discovered an article entitled "Where's the Power?" by Samuel H. Moffett, the well-known Presbyterian missionary to China and Korea. The article was originally an address that he delivered to the Presbyterian Congress on Renewal in January of 1985. It was then re-printed in "The Princeton Seminary Bulletin" (1985; Vol. 6, Number 2), which is where I found it. It is an excellent article based upon Acts 1:8, and Moffett is disarmingly honest about the powerlessness of the present day church, with confessions like, "You see, I'm a Presbyterian. I have order and decency up to here. But where's the power?"

In the course of the article, Moffett recounts a story that you may have heard before, but which bears repeating. Let me simply quote Moffett, since I would have a hard time improving on his account:

We are more naive even than the Arab chieftains Lawrence of Arabia brought with him to the Paris Peace Conference. Perhaps you have read the story. These men of the desert were amazed at many things, but nothing astonished them half so much as the running water in their hotel rooms. They knew the scarcity of water and its value, yet here it was to be had by the turning of a tap, free and seemingly exhaustless. When they prepared to leave Paris, Lawrence found them trying to detach the faucets so that out in their dry deserts they might always have water. He tried to explain that behind the flowing taps were huge reservoirs, and that without this supply the faucets were useless. But the Arabs insisted. They were sure that the magic instruments would give them water forever.

Let me be lovingly blunt. The church today is full of "spiritual Arabs" whose understanding of revival (and any genuine movement of the Spirit of God) and its origins is on about the same level as those Arab chieftains and their understanding of faucets and modern plumbing. How can you spot such "spiritual Arabs"? It's really quite simple. They believe and teach that revival (or any genuine move of God's Spirit) is the result and product of a technique. In other words, if you want water (i.e., the Holy Spirit), all you need to do is to turn the faucet (insert favorite technique at this point). Like their Arab predecessors, they have become enamored with the instrument (the faucet) with the unfortunate result that they have confused the instrument with the source. They want water and are willing to settle for any instrument that appears able to temporarily satisfy their thirst. Like the spiritual Arabs they have become, such people are blissfully ignorant that behind the faucet is a reservoir of boundless supply. They are content to study the faucet. To build schools to study and teach the proper operation of faucets. To open faucet franchises. To encourage the building of more faucets. To write books about how you, too, can build and operate a faucet.

Now, lets move closer to home (literally). House church, in all of its various manifestations (house church, simple church, organic church, etc.) is a faucet. That's all.

And the danger we now face in the house church movement is the danger of allowing ourselves to become "spiritual Arabs." A plethora of books are now coming to market about the "right" and "wrong" ways to do house church. May I politely suggest that you ignore the books, because, in reality there is only one "wrong" way to do house church. What will ultimately and eventually kill the house church movement will be for house churches to become another faucet promoted and populated by "spiritual Arabs" who have mistaken the instrument for the source, who have confused the channel with the River.

I believe that the promise of the house church movement (or "organic church" or "simple church" or whatever label you want to attach) is that God is sovereignly raising up a new channel for the River of His Spirit. The coming revival is not a meeting (whether in a house church or in a traditional institutional church). It is a River, the River of His Spirit, flowing freely through the lives of individuals. Revival is not a faucet. It is a reservoir of the Spirit of God. God is raising up this new channel for the River of His Spirit because He fully intends to pour out His River in fresh power and to fill the channel to overflowing. Don't become distracted by focusing on the faucet. Prepare the channel.

Pray for the coming of the River. And get prepared for a new lesson on God's plumbing!
Let The River Flow!

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